
Labour statistics from household-based surveys

The two key official sources of labour statistics in South Africa are the *Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS)* and the *Quarterly Employment Statistics (QES)* survey. The *QES* is an establishment-based survey and obtains data from employers to estimate trends in employment, wages, productivity and unit labour costs. The *QES* covers enterprises registered for income tax, with the exception of agricultural businesses, and provides the data underpinning the analyses on *employment* and *labour cost and productivity* in the *Quarterly Bulletin*.

Quarterly analysis of the labour market can be extended through the *QLFS*, which is a household-based survey based on a sample of approximately 30 000 households. It complements the *QES* as a source of information on broader labour market participation, unemployment and employment throughout the economy. Apart from the formal non-agricultural sector, employment elsewhere in the economy (notably in the informal, agricultural and domestic services sectors) is also captured. The revised *QLFS* was launched in August 2008 with a quarterly frequency, replacing the previous biannual *Labour Force Survey* (spanning the period 2000 to 2007)

The *QLFS* incorporating data for the fourth quarter of 2008 has recently been released, and showed an increase in overall employment and a decrease in the unemployment rate from the third to the fourth quarter of 2008 (see the table on page 17). While this seems to contradict the contraction in the seasonally adjusted real gross domestic product in the final quarter of 2008, it should be remembered that the quarterly seasonal characteristics of the *QLFS* data are unknown; several years of quarterly *QLFS* data would be required to establish these characteristics. The most recent survey was the first time that data surveying the labour force had been obtained for the October–December quarter of the year.

More generally, given the substantial differences in sources and methods used, considerable caution should be exercised whenever *QES* and *QLFS* data are compared.

Key labour market indicators from the *Quarterly Labour Force Survey*

	2008			
	Jan–Mar	Apr–Jun	Jul–Sep	Oct–Dec
	Thousands			
Labour force.....	17 810	17 840	17 770	17 720
Total employed.....	13 620	13 730	13 650	13 850
Formal sector excluding agriculture	9 340	9 410	9 440	9 540
Informal sector excluding agriculture	2 320	2 340	2 170	2 250
Agriculture	800	790	770	760
Private households.....	1 160	1 190	1 270	1 300
Unemployed.....	4 190	4 110	4 120	3 870
Not economically active	12 800	12 860	13 020	13 180
Discouraged work-seekers	1 180	1 080	1 070	1 170
Unemployment rate (per cent).....	23,5	23,1	23,2	21,9

Source: Statistics South Africa
Numbers may not add up to the totals due to rounding

References

Morris, J. 2003. *Reconciling labour volume measurement: the issues and examples*. Auckland: Labour Market Statistics Division, Statistics New Zealand.

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